

May 2007

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Introduction

In recent years, the region defined by Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Jackson counties has made significant strides in collaboration by bringing together area stakeholders in business, K-12 and higher education, economic development, organized labor, South Central Michigan Works! (SCMW), and State Regional Skills Alliance (RSA) staff under the umbrella of its South Central Michigan Smart Growth Collaborative (SGC).

SGC was formed approximately five years ago, and now meets quarterly. Its membership includes representatives from the following areas and entities:

- Hillsdale County:
 - Economic Development Partnership
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Industrial Development Commission
 - Intermediate School District
- Jackson County:
 - The Enterprise Group of Jackson
 - Jackson Area Manufacturers Association (JAMA)
 - Jackson Community College (JCC)
 - Intermediate School District
- Lenawee County:
 - Chamber for Economic Development
 - Intermediate School District
- Regional Skills Alliances for manufacturing, health care, and biotechnology
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- South Central Michigan Works!
- Private industry
- Organized labor

SCMW is the natural convener of this group, as its service area spans the same tricounty region. In the summer of 2006, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) launched its 21st Century Workforce Initiative and provided \$50,000 for the agency to facilitate regional partnering in pursuit of collaborative improvements that could help to avert economic decline. This provided an excellent opportunity for SGC to question its membership in some depth about the current state of their cooperative efforts and set a path toward better meeting the workforce and economic development challenges of the new economy within its region.

The strategic plan submitted to DLEG in October of 2006 presented how SCMW intended to develop a more specific plan for meeting these goals, including retaining Public Policy Associates, Incorporated to conduct related research and product development. Three main products were outlined: a gap analysis, a resources map, and a series of model program manuals. The first two in this list were intended to yield further information in support of new steps in addressing the goals of the Initiative. This revised strategic plan takes into account the outcome

of the gap analysis and presents the direction SGC intends from this point forward. The gap analysis report was based on interviews conducted with 27 SGC members and member organization staff. The interviews were held in November and December of 2006 and the report was delivered to SCMW in early 2007. The interview questions were based on the six strategic areas identified by the 21st Century Workforce Initiative:

- Working with employers
- Regional workforce and economy
- Rapid response
- Layoff aversion, business enhancement services
- Talent
- Communications

The gap analysis report highlights possibilities for future economic and workforce development in the region and enhancement of existing partnerships. Plans to develop a regional resources map are underway as well to identify the programs and funding available across the region. This region's organizational vitality and willingness to collaborate across county borders has set the stage for continued improvement of service delivery and a stronger regional economy.

Plan Organization

This strategic plan follows the focus areas defined by the 21st Century Workforce Initiative plan review checklist. Included is special emphasis on the entities active in the tricounty region for each strategic area and the steps planned to enhance programs, partnering, and awareness. It ends with a discussion of the next steps in SGC's implementation of the plan.

Focus Areas

Working With Employers

The 21st Century Workforce Initiative calls for a unified local approach to working with employers, both within the different programs housed in the Michigan Works! Agencies (MWAs) and across workforce and economic development entities in a region. The underlying principle of this strategic area is that employers benefit from demand-driven, customized solutions approaches.

Key Partners

The SGC membership has evolved several strong relationships and systems to strengthen the region's employer offerings and support services. SCG members working independently and in conjunction with one another in this area include:

- Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce
- The Enterprise Group of Jackson
- Lenawee County Chamber for Economic Development
- SCMW staff, specifically its Business Solutions representatives
- MEDC and Regional Skills Alliances (RSAs) staff at state level
- JCC and JAMA

These partners readily accept and promote the idea that employers are their primary customers, and that without successful employers, the region's entire economy suffers.

Strategies and Activities

Ongoing:

Several strategies are presently underway to promote consistent and effective employer contact. These are:

- Partnering to establish and maintain strong health care and biotechnology RSAs.
- Joint site visits between SCMW and economic development to area businesses for retention and business enhancement services. For example, SCMW has provided partners with Executive Pulse, a contact tracking software. SCMW's Business Solutions team implements the Business Enhancement through Solutions and Training (BEST).
- A business incubator exists in Jackson County, run by The Enterprise Group, which fosters young businesses.
- A Manufacturers Board of Review sponsored by JAMA meets on a monthly basis to provide input, oversight, and assistance on the delivery and development of customized training solutions targeted to industry needs.
- The new biofuel plant in Adrian is being supported by the Lenawee Chamber for Economic Development, the Lenawee ISD, and others in order to aid in the industry's growth in the

area. Jackson Community College and Delta Community College are working together to create and deliver curricula to get job seekers and employees the training needed to work in this new plant. This support effort is also part of Lenawee County's attempt to diversify its economy, which includes work with the University of Michigan and the Community Economic Adjustment Program.

Upcoming:

SGC members plan to develop further the key approaches already in existence, to promote further collaboration. By building on past successes and networks, the SGC expects even smoother business enhancement solutions delivery and better communication in aid of the region's employers.

- The first improvement will be in expanding support for early entrepreneurship beyond Jackson into Lenawee and Hillsdale Counties.
 - Support will come in a variety of forms, including recognition in each county of businesses or business leaders who have supported entrepreneurship in their community.
 - Entrepreneurial Forums will also be organized in each county.
 - ◆ The Economic Development Partnership of Hillsdale County partnered with the Hillsdale College chapter of the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) to present an inaugural "Ground Breakers Entrepreneurial Forum." This event took place on Monday, March 26th, 2007 from 8:30am to 12:30pm at the Dow Conference Center on the campus of Hillsdale College. The focus of this event was to stimulate interest in entrepreneurship, and to provide information and resources that will assist young entrepreneurs in starting their own successful businesses.
- In addition, SGC plans to assist other organizations in promoting entrepreneurial events. One new program that was recently established in Hillsdale was SAGE – retired and current professionals who volunteer to assist entrepreneurs with startup and questions. The other focuses are:
 - Providing focus and assistance with entrepreneurial activities and assist in identifying resources for success of these individuals.
 - Working collaboratively with regional entrepreneurial efforts in the development and implementation of activities promoting entrepreneurship growth and to create additional customized training and workshops focusing on entrepreneurship and self-reliance.
 - Working collaboratively with regional entrepreneurial efforts in the development and implementation of activities promoting entrepreneurship growth and providing business startup assistance and entrepreneurship training to job seekers and small business owners who connect with SCMW.
 - Coordinating with SCMW to provide training and assistance weekly on site at the Jackson Service Center. Services may also include training outside of normal business hours, including weeknights and weekends to accommodate individuals.
 - Assisting the Small Business & Technology Development Center (SBTDC) director in understanding fully all tools and resources available through the SCMW system. The director would then be responsible for training SCMW subcontractor staff on all available resources and expertise available through the SBTDC network.
 - Offering a host of training activities, workshops, seminars/events, and other services through the network.

- In order to assist established companies more effectively, SGC partners will enhance the work currently underway to help companies be proactive in diversifying markets and products. Coordination of these efforts will assist the region in achieving maximum results. Below, a list of the main facets of the market diversification activities in the region:
 - GLTAAC's program aimed at manufacturing firms in distress includes diagnosis, planning, and assistance with implementation.
 - MMTC's program focuses on the broader employer base, and offers identification, assessment, and training and consultation.
 - DLEG's Rapid Response Team provides technical assistance to regional staff regarding succession planning, trend and sector analysis, pre-feasibility studies, and the like to support sound decision-making.
 - SCMW and MSU's Business Solutions Training builds capacity for close relationships with employers, allowing better communication about the services available in the region.
- The Executive Pulse software, already available to relevant partners within SGC, will become the main employer contact tracking system among the partners. In order to efficiently use this system, additional training will be provided to partners about the system and its use. The gap analysis revealed that partners are interested in avoiding duplication of entries, so discussions will be held to set a timeline for the transfer of information into the EP system. Using a single system across the partners will eliminate the need for duplication.

Organizational Responsibilities

For the early entrepreneurship activity, primary responsibility for implementation will rest with SCMW and the three counties' economic development organizations. In addition, partners such as MI-SBTDC, Jackson Community College, Hillsdale College, State organizations and networks, K-12, community foundations, and other interested organizations and individuals will contribute to the forums and events.

For the market diversification support activity, JAMA, the Lenawee Chamber for Economic Development, and SCMW are each working to conduct outreach to employers and make use of the technical assistance available through DLEG from the Michigan State University, University of Michigan, and MMTC.

The employer contact tracking system is being promoted by SCMW. The agency will be responsible for gathering the economic development partners and providing additional training.

Milestones

The major milestones for these activities are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Working With Employers Milestones

Plan Component	Major Milestones
1. Early entrepreneurship support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognition events in each county. ■ Establishment of volunteer group for support of entrepreneurship and small business start-ups ■ Regional cooperation and assistance ■ Establishment of a business incubator in Lenawee County.
2. Market diversification support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Informational meetings with businesses ■ Referral of TA providers to businesses ■ Initiate process within the region
3. Executive Pulse system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agreement on timeline for full use of the system ■ Complete transfer of relevant data to the system ■ Active use of the system by all relevant partners

Time Frame

The plan components detailed above will be carried out over a series of months. The table below charts the progress anticipated within the first year, beginning with July 2007.

Table 2: Working with Employers Timeline

Plan Component	Timeline for Action			
	<i>Months 1-3</i>	<i>Months 4-6</i>	<i>Months 7-9</i>	<i>Months 10-12</i>
1. Early entrepreneurship support	●	●	●	●
2. Market diversification support	●	●	●	●
3. Executive Pulse system	●	●		

Regional Workforce and Economy

This component of the 21st Century Workforce Initiative focuses on the availability and use of data to assess the status of the workforce and regional economy, such as established and emerging industry sectors, high-growth occupations, and unemployment rates. It also entails the creation of a resources map of area partners, programming, and funding. Within the SGC currently, SCMW provides annual reports of the state of the workforce within the region. Additional information as it becomes available is also shared among partners. However, SGC recognizes the value of ensuring that this data is complete and usable for all its members. In addition, a resources map will provide a new, systematic way of determining where duplication is occurring among the partners' services, and where funding resources might be reallocated for maximum leveraging.

Key Partners

The key partners in the Regional Workforce and Development area include:

- U.S Census Bureau (Local Employment Dynamics tool)
- SCMW
- State government, particularly the Labor Market Information (LMI) office

Strategies and Activities

Ongoing:

SCMW currently works diligently to compile and share workforce data for the region with its partners in SGC. Formats for this data include annual State of the Workforce reports and informal data sharing with partners by the director. Information is created monthly and sent out to all SGC partners, Boards and elected officials, media contacts, and placed on SCMW Web site. Specific requests are handled as needed and customized to these requests. The information is gathered from resources such as Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. (EMSI) and Michigan's LMI office. Partners also come to SCMW to request assistance in locating needed information quickly. Recently, such requests have come from the Michigan State University Extension and others operating locally.

In addition to data distribution, SCMW also holds an annual Contractor Retreat in which the service providers collaborate with administrative staff to better communicate and disseminate information on workforce development issues.

Upcoming:

The regional workforce and economy is a broad concern, demanding a broad response. In order to maintain data that will effectively inform decision-making within the region related to workforce and economic development, SGC plans to:

- Quantify extraregional economic ties to identify potential areas for action. Previously, a study had been conducted to identify the labor pool of the region and its qualities. This study found that the workforce had many skill levels, but that many of these valuable employees were working outside of the region, even outside the state. SGC proposes to conduct a study to update this information in order to determine the current patterns of employment. This knowledge will then enable SGC to reach out to partners in the main locations where the region's residents find work.
- Develop and maintain a spirit of interdependence (due to cross-jurisdictional worker migration) among the SGC counties and with neighboring regions through information sharing and leveraging of resources. In the words of Peter Drucker, a nonprofit management and leadership expert, "If our modern pluralist society is to escape the same fate, the leaders of all institutions will have to learn to be leaders beyond the walls."
 - Aware of its placement within the lower I-94 corridor, SCMW joined with three other Michigan Works! agencies (Calhoun ISD, Kalamazoo-St. Joseph, and Berrien-Cass-Van Buren) to apply for a WIRED grant. This sort of collaboration recognizes the overlapping economic interests that are often shared by the counties bordering SGC's own.

- As additional opportunities arise, SGC will encourage discussion and cooperation within the region as well as beyond, to firmly establish an integrated, interdependent system.
- Make use of the LED resource available through the U.S. Census Bureau in order to supplement current information and to aid in regional decision making. This is a valuable tool for tracking commute and labor sheds, among other relevant data.

Organizational Responsibilities

In this strategic area, data collection and distribution are being led by SCMW. The agency is also responsible for coordination of outreach to other areas. As data identifying extraregional economic ties are made available and analyzed, partnership development will involve the economic development and workforce partners of SGC.

Milestones

The major milestones for these activities are shown in the table below.

Table 3: Regional Workforce and Economy Milestones	
Plan Component	Major Milestones
1. Extraregional economic ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Meet to determine research goals and parameters ■ Contract for study ■ Review study findings and determine outreach strategy ■ Engage extraregional partners
2. Spirit of interdependence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify opportunities to promote understanding of mutual interests across counties and neighboring regions
3. Use of the LED resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Access resource and determine data desired ■ Devise data sharing method ■ Share data with relevant partners ■ Meet to discuss strategic use of data

Time Frame

The plan components detailed above will be carried out over a series of months. The table below charts the progress anticipated within the first year, beginning with July 2007.

Table 4: Regional Workforce and Economy				
Plan Component	Timeline for Action			
	<i>Months 1-3</i>	<i>Months 4-6</i>	<i>Months 7-9</i>	<i>Months 10-12</i>
1. Extraregional economic ties			•	•
2. Spirit of interdependence	•	•	•	•
3. Use of the LED resource		•	•	•

Rapid Response

The rapid response strategic area of the 21st Century Workforce Initiative entails coordinated regional efforts to address significant layoffs or full plant closures, with a particular focus on data tracking and workforce assistance services. In particular, the Initiative seeks to improve regional efficiency in addressing job loss.

Key Partners

In addition to SCMW, these SGC members contribute to rapid response efforts within the region:

- Tricounty economic development entities and chambers
- JCC and other education and training providers
- MEDC
- Organized labor

Strategies and Activities

Ongoing:

Current efforts to react quickly to mass layoffs and plant closings are structured to involve multiple partners and provide onsite assistance to workers whenever possible. Through a multifaceted approach, the region has improved on its past rapid response system. Examples of actions taking place now are:

- Information sharing among key partners in business, workforce, MEDC, and economic development organizations allows for early, aligned response.
- Through the Mobile One-Stop Center (MOC-1) vehicle, or through staff, onsite skills assessment, training, and other resource connecting can be done before the workers leave employment when there is cooperation by the employer.
- Job placement and entrepreneurial development occur as appropriate.

Upcoming:

SGC plans to augment these efforts by improving its partnerships to cope with rapid response situations and to enhance the communication and coordination that occurs in response to notices of closings or layoffs. Specifically, these activities include:

- Building stronger relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs). Currently, SCMW does work with organizations such as Lifeways, but SGC believes CBOs can bring additional resources to the problem at hand, and can bolster staff capacity. CBOs also have the potential of reaching workers in ways the other partners cannot, such as with counseling regarding the loss of a long-time position. Overall, the inclusion of CBO partners will ultimately improve the quality of the response outcomes by improving the services provided to affected workers.
 - To achieve the new partnerships, SGC proposes to seek out and foster relationships with CBOs in the region, like Goodwill, Salvation Army, and Community Action.

- Determining where information sharing to prepare for an upcoming rapid response situation might be improved, and addressing these improvements with clear communication protocols. Currently, SCMW business services team members meet biweekly with other SCG partner representatives to share information and discuss the region's economic situation. However, even with this regular contact, there are times where the partners' responsibilities in a rapid response situation become muddled, or information is not communicated at the level desired (including sometimes overzealousness). SGC also wants to ensure that the information sharing system includes smooth communication with the state rapid response team at DLEG and MEDC. By communicating more effectively with these entities, rapid response efforts locally can be improved.
- SGC also plans to act extraregionally to disseminate information about the successful partnerships and programs at work in the tricounty area that underpin the region's improvement in layoff aversion outcomes. This includes the generation of model program manuals for the approach SCMW and its economic development partners take to rapid response. The response to both of these initiatives will be monitored closely to incorporate constructive feedback back into the region's strategic approach to layoff aversion and business enhancement services.

Organizational Responsibilities

For both of these activities related to rapid response, SGC expects strong involvement from SCMW, the economic development organizations, the chambers, and others, as relevant. SGC anticipates that each organization will commit personnel and other resources to building relationships and furthering the success of the region's rapid response abilities.

Milestones

The major milestones for these activities are shown in the table below.

Table 5: Rapid Response Milestones	
Plan Component	Major Milestones
1. Relationships with CBOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bring additional CBOs into the team ■ Determine clear roles for CBOs
2. Rapid response communication protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Meet to establish clarity ■ Prepare a document outlining the protocol and distribute to partners in rapid response team ■ Begin consistent use of protocol

Time Frame

The plan components detailed above will be carried out over a series of months. The table below charts the progress anticipated within the first year, beginning with July 2007.

Table 6: Rapid Response Timeline

Plan Component	Timeline for Action			
	<i>Months 1-3</i>	<i>Months 4-6</i>	<i>Months 7-9</i>	<i>Months 10-12</i>
1. Relationships with CBOs		●	●	●
2. Rapid response communication protocol	●			

Regional Layoff Aversion and Business Enhancement Services

Layoff aversion is the major impetus for the 21st Century Workforce Initiative. To succeed at layoff aversion, business intelligence is fundamental. The intelligence gathering process can be enhanced by building trusting relationships with employers and by maximizing relevant data sharing (on a need-to-know basis).

Key Partners

SGC currently partners with all the main entities able to contribute to layoff aversion and business enhancement services. Among these are:

- SCMW
- Tricounty economic development entities
- MEDC
- Private industry
- Organized labor
- Michigan State University
- 21st Century Partners

Strategies and Activities

Ongoing:

Overall, the region has placed a great deal of emphasis on layoff aversion strategies and business enhancement services in recent years (see previous sections for further details). There has been ongoing concern about establishing ways to avoid layoff situations, including through the use of preventative measures such as business training that will assist companies in responding more effectively to market changes. SCMW has developed a Layoff Prevention Initiative that has been used with a few companies to do just this.

In addition, MSU's School of Labor & Industrial Relations has created a Business Solutions Training curriculum in conjunction with SCMW, modeled on the BEST program being used in the region. The training is designed to develop and certify the ability of participants to perform the function of the Business Solutions Professional (BSP). This training is provided under a grant from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth. Topics and learning activities cover the range of knowledge and skills required of the Business Solutions

Professional. At the conclusion of the training, participants will have demonstrated their competency to perform as a BSP through discussions, activities, and fieldwork.

Instructors for the training are faculty members in the School of Labor & Industrial Relations. Instructors are experienced in both classroom teaching and professional development training. Training is a blend of classroom and on-line instruction and fieldwork. Participants are expected to attend and actively participate in all sessions, complete on line assignments, and complete fieldwork within the specified time. Participants have the option of taking this training as a for-credit course at MSU. Students can earn six 400-level social science credit hours. Those selecting this option must enroll and pay tuition. Students may enroll as regular students or as a lifelong education student. Participants taking the course for credit are required to complete additional assignments.

The intent of the program is to position these professionals to help avert layoffs by building *active* relationships with businesses and economic developers. By forming strong relationships with individuals in the local communities, they will be privileged with sensitive information, with the opportunity for early intervention. These relationships also open companies to hear new information about market diversification and other matters that they might not be willing to hear otherwise.

Upcoming:

For strategic development in this area, SGC plans to address opportunities to deepen its analytical capacity in business intelligence. One goal is the broad use of the information system Executive Pulse among partners; another is the incorporation of new data streams and models into the management tools currently available in the area.

This latter goal will be addressed in part by accessing the technical assistance made available by DLEG through various data contractors around the state. This assistance may take the form of training, research, and data analysis projects that can result in institutional knowledge as well as actionable information on the state of area businesses and future trends in various industries of interest. In particular, the region is interested in the assistance of UM in helping to identify any local companies that may be struggling.

Individual/Organizational Responsibilities

The primary organization responsible for pursuing new business intelligence to aid in layoff aversion is SCMW. The agency will seek out the assistance of UM, and the other contractors as needed, to arrange for technical assistance and to target that assistance to the needs of the region as a whole.

Milestones

The major milestones for this activity are shown in the table below.

Table 7: Layoff Aversion and Business Enhancement Milestones

Plan Component	Major Milestones
1. Deepening business intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement coordinated use of Executive Pulse ■ Determine specific assistance focus(es) ■ Receive assistance within defined time frame ■ Act on information and advice received

Time Frame

The plan components detailed above will be carried out over a series of months. The table below charts the progress anticipated within the first year, beginning with July 2007.

Table 8: Layoff Aversion and Business Enhancement Timeline

Plan Component	Timeline for Action			
	<i>Months 1-3</i>	<i>Months 4-6</i>	<i>Months 7-9</i>	<i>Months 10-12</i>
1. Deepening business intelligence		●	●	

Develop, Attract, and Retain Talent

Ultimately, a talented workforce is determinant to the success of any economy. Developing, attracting, and retaining a knowledgeable and skilled workforce is therefore a focus of the 21st Century Workforce Initiative.

This is more significant in the South Central Michigan region, where the traditional manufacturing base that has predominated for generations is meeting significant competition and new economic development spells the future of the region. The tricounty region is now beginning to transition into other industries such as chemicals and biotechnology while also maintaining, as much as possible, the traditional sectors.

The issues of talent and education reach a vital crossroads where they concern young people entering the workforce. According to the interviews of SGC members, this area has much unmined potential.

Key Partners

The SGC currently includes membership from the region's three intermediate school districts (ISDs) and other education representatives. These are:

- Hillsdale County ISD
- Jackson County ISD
- Lenawee County ISD

- Jackson Area Manufacturers Association (JAMA)
- Jackson Community College (JCC)
- Adrian College
- Hillsdale College
- Sienna Heights University
- Spring Arbor University
- SCMW
- Regional Skills Connection
- RSAs

Strategies and Activities

Ongoing:

Within the region, there have been some efforts to develop the talent of the region among SGC partners. These efforts include:

- Development of RSAs within the region. The RSAs currently operating in the region address the needs of advanced manufacturing, health care, and biotechnology employers.
- Curriculum creation by SCMW. Success Skills is a program intended to assess and develop key “soft skills” among job seekers. Success Skills also assesses basic academic and computer skills. Those who successfully pass the assessments are then certified by the agency as employment ready.
- Activity of the Regional Skill Connection (RSC). The RSC has facilitated the connection of education and business through the Business Fellowship Program. This program, adopted from Spring Arbor College by SCMW, links K-12 teachers with area businesses to provide the teachers with workplace experiences in key industries so they might incorporate real-world learning into their classrooms. The program has expanded and grown in success over the past year.
- Curriculum has been developed for health care careers by JCC, in connection with Foote Hospital (Jackson). In addition, JAMA has an academy within its organization that provides training in advanced manufacturing.
- SCG currently supports projects like JAMA’s “I Can Make It” camp and Lenawee County’s “Made in Lenawee” program that provide career exploration and career skills development opportunities to youth in the region.

Upcoming:

Through the gap analysis research, it was determined that more needs to be done within the region to position it as the supplier of a strong workforce. In particular, there is consensus that the public, as a whole, needs a better understanding of the changing workforce needs of the region, and the education and training required to be part of these. SGC plans to undertake these initiatives in order to strengthen the region’s talent:

- Survey a cross-section of the region’s employers to determine the changing skill needs new jobs will demand. By learning more about the jobs that the region’s employers anticipate, and the skills that are required by these jobs, the various workforce development and education members of SGC can work to prepare the residents of the region for in-demand jobs, and be responsive to the needs of employers in the region.

- Increase resource-leveraging efforts for enhanced higher education engagement. Leveraging the resources of the ISDs and other partners, SGC will support and develop additional “educational pipeline” programs and projects inside the classroom and via extracurricular activities.
 - At their core, these programs will focus on providing workforce-relevant career exploration and skills development opportunities to students throughout their entire K-16 educational experience.
 - By linking these programs together, SGC will help to create seamless career pathways that not only prepare students for valuable careers, but will also give students the skills and abilities they will need to be successful in those careers.
- Build relationships with the colleges of the region, including Spring Arbor, Baker, and Sienna Heights. These colleges are valuable contributors to the education and training of the region’s population, and as such, they have much to offer when discussing and planning for new projects to benefit local communities or the region as a whole.
 - SGC suggests a summit take place to bring together these colleges to define goals and individual contributions.
- Develop and place communications to promote postsecondary education among the public. This communication is necessary to improve the responsiveness of the communities within the region to lifelong learning. (This item is addressed in more depth under the Communications area.)

Individual/Organizational Responsibilities

All education and workforce entities within the region need to be involved in these efforts. Consistency of message and leveraging of resources are essential to establishing and implementing education-related activities. Working in a collaborative fashion, the members of SGC will act in unison to share insights, set goals, act, and monitor progress. It is likely that SCMW will serve as the convenor.

Milestones

The major milestones for these activities are shown in the table below.

Table 9: Talent Milestones	
Plan Component	Major Milestones
1. Survey region’s employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Determine research goals ■ Conduct research and analyze results ■ Review findings and determine next steps
2. Educational pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Meet to select programs, or to determine program gaps ■ Establish resource leveraging plan among partners ■ Institute new programs
3. Relationships with colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Meet to determine shared priorities ■ Hold regional summit
4. Promote postsecondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devise marketing/communications plan ■ Implement plan

Time Frame

The plan components detailed above will be carried out over a series of months. The table below charts the progress anticipated within the first year, beginning with July 2007.

Table 10: Talent Timeline				
Plan Component	Timeline for Action			
	<i>Months 1-3</i>	<i>Months 4-6</i>	<i>Months 7-9</i>	<i>Months 10-12</i>
1. Survey region's employers		•	•	
2. Educational pipeline	•	•	•	•
3. Relationships with colleges		•	•	
4. Promote postsecondary education			•	•

Communications Strategy

The 21st Century Initiative includes a call for the MWA convenors to work in collaboration with regional stakeholders to formulate a detailed communications plan to address each major element of a coordinated regional strategy. A part of this is directing targeted messages to partners, employers, and the general public. As mentioned earlier, the interviews conducted for the gap analysis revealed some concern regarding the extent of employer awareness and understanding of the diversity of services available through SCMW and the SGC and the need for greater knowledge in the public of the changing economic situation. Taking these issues to heart, SGC is planning actions to improve the public and employer understanding of how the region can operate together and how they can position themselves to succeed in the 21st century.

Key Partners

All SGC members have the potential to contribute to communications efforts. SCMW has a staff member dedicated to communications and marketing for the agency, and this person has contributed to increasing exposure for the agency's work. SCMW also has its MOC-1 vehicle that acts as an advertisement tool in addition to its function as a mobile training and resource-sharing tool. The potential for contribution by other SGC partners will be part of the exploration of this strategic area.

Strategies and Activities

Ongoing:

Currently, SGC is an unknown entity to the general public. Each member organization of SGC has its own communications efforts, of course. However, jointly, there is much the members can do to promote the common goal of economic success for the tricounty region.

Upcoming:

In considering the wide field of opportunity in this strategic area, SGC has chosen to develop a communications campaign that addresses the changing economy and the positive steps being taken to improve the prospects of the region. SGC also plans to place additional emphasis on communication with employers, to improve the awareness of and use of available services. In order to forward these goals, SGC plans to:

- Improve the entire network's communication and employer accessibility to assistance. "No wrong door" procedures across SGC will be evaluated closely to determine where changes are needed. For instance, new materials may be needed to capture the many resources for employers or to reframe the manner in which services are explained.
- Balance knowledge about the wide variety of services available with what will really be of use to any specific employer. Drawing on the BEST approach, employers are currently approached by business solutions representatives from SCMW by assessing employer needs and recommending certain activities in follow-up. However, it seems that some employers in the region also need to be made independently aware of the services available to them. Nonetheless, the region wishes to maintain a healthy balance between widespread, stand-alone material and intensive, customized contact. In the end, any contact or explanation of services must be consistent across partners.
- Reach out to the job seeker, students, and employed to spur lifelong learning. SGC is interested in partnering with Capital Area Michigan Works! on their "Keep Learning" initiative <http://www.learnforourfuture.org/> and feel that a focus like this will be a great start. This will be an initiative for the Regional Skill Connection (education advisory group). SGC also believes that working closely with employers on continued learning and skill upgrades for incumbent workers will be a must.
- Communicate with and target underserved customers. These customers have included (or will include) returning veterans, older Americans, newly released offenders (as part of the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative), and others to be determined.

Individual/Organizational Responsibilities

All of the SGC members have contributions to make to the communications activities. Whether education, economic development, workforce, or private industry affiliated, the various members are vital partners in deciding on messaging, because without the support of all, the methods and messages may not resonate with employers or the public. Consistency and cooperation is important to a firm representation of the economic and workforce future in the tricounty region. All communication and marketing representatives from the various organizations will be encouraged to participate in these discussions and activities. They will also be encouraged to maintain contact with one another and to share the communications plans within their respective organizations.

Milestones

The major milestones for these activities are shown in the table below.

Table 11: Communications Milestones

Plan Component	Major Milestones
1. Reexamine employer contact across network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hold bimonthly Business Solutions meetings to communicate and coordinate employer outreach activities across the region ■ Participate in regional employer networking opportunities
2. Balance employer knowledge of system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish educational manuals on services available to employers ■ Establish informational meetings with employers across the region ■ Directly target employer education of the system through radio, television, and quarterly newsletter
3. Lifelong learning outreach to public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Creation of information material for the Success Skills Credential ■ Collaboration with local colleges, universities, and skilled trade schools to promote lifelong learning options

Time Frame

The plan components detailed above will be carried out over a series of months. The table below charts the progress anticipated within the first year, beginning with October 2007.

Table 12: Communications Timeline

Plan Component	Timeline for Action			
	<i>Months 1-3</i>	<i>Months 4-6</i>	<i>Months 7-9</i>	<i>Months 10-12</i>
1. Reexamine employer contact across network	●	●	●	
2. Balance employer knowledge of system	●	●	●	
3. Lifelong learning outreach to public		●	●	●

Next Steps

The SGC members view SCMW as an ongoing strategic asset since it bridges the three counties of the South Central Michigan region, has infrastructure to convene the various area stakeholders, and active interest by its leadership in partnering activities and resource pooling. The next steps, therefore, point to SCMW setting the stage for more frequent SGC meetings, with the intention of implementing the steps discussed in this strategic plan. SGC members recognize the potential benefit that can come from further developing the group's relationships and resource sharing. The work on the Regional Resources Map is underway, and this too will help SGC determine priorities that will ultimately better the economic vitality of the Jackson, Hillsdale, and Lenawee counties.